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C O N F I D E N T I A L HELSINKI 001132

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NB

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SUBJECT: E-PINE: FINLAND COMMITS TO SEND OBSERVERS TO
UKRAINE ELECTIONS

REF: SECSTATE 181293 (NOTAL)

Classified By: POLOFF DAVID ALLEN SCHLAEFER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) Per reftel instructions, Pol Chief and Poloff demarched Tuula Yrjola, the desk officer for Ukraine, and Terhi Hakala, Director on the Unit for East Europe and Central Asia, about the need for additional election observers in Ukraine during upcoming elections. Poloffs noted the interest Finland had expressed at the last e-PINE PolDirs' meeting about democratization in Ukraine, and stressed that this was an excellent opportunity to use the e-PINE framework to advance our shared agenda in Kiev. Hakala agreed, and said that Finland was prepared to commit up to 4 election observers for the October first-round and November run-off elections. She said that it would be difficult to commit more than 4 since Finland had also been asked to send observers to Minsk to cover Belorussian elections during the same time period. However, Hakala said that Finland was extremely interested in what happens in Ukraine and would consider sending additional observers if possible.

2. (C) Hakala and Yrjola also shared their views about the upcoming Ukrainian elections. Hakala opined that while it was unrealistic to hold out hope for "fair and free" elections in Ukraine now, the GoF was at least looking for progress toward that goal. She said the Finns take every opportunity they can to stress to the Ukrainian government the need for democratic reform. She said that Finnish observers would be monitoring issues such as the incidence of ballot stuffing, how much pressure there was on voters at polling precincts to select certain candidates, and how much pressure was put on the media (and the media's reaction) to slant coverage of the candidates. Hakala said that it was still unclear which of the two leading candidates would likely win the election, although Yanukovych was clearly Putin's choice, and this gave him a marked advantage. Both Hakala and Yrjola said that a Yanoukovych victory would lead to a realignment in the power balance among Ukraine's organized crime/business "clans," and also likely lead to a change in Ukraine's policy toward the EU.

3. (C) Yrjola said that the Ukrainian foreign minister might visit Helsinki shortly before the October 14 e-PINE meeting in Washington, and that the visit might profitably inform the e-PINE discussion of Ukraine. Asked if she thought there were any Ukraine-related projects that might benefit from discussion under the e-PINE umbrella, Hakala said that GoF wants to pay more attention to freedom of the media, and plans to invite Ukrainian journalists to Helsinki to learn some fundamentals. She said that it might be useful to gather journalists from several FSU nations at once for an English-language or Russian-language program.

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